



Adult Learning Within Reach

Member Lecture – 7 April 2022

Animal psychology: the wolf in your dog
Dr Joanne Wilshaw, WEA tutor

Questions answered post-lecture

Q1 Is it legal to own a wolf?

It is legal to own a wolf if you have a Dangerous wild animals licence and can pass all the inspections for secure and appropriate housing / enclosures / veterinary support etc.

Q2 There was a wolf called Romeo in Alaska that actively played with domestic dogs being walked by humans – is this normal wolf behaviour?

In my experience wolves either, attack and kill dogs or they absolutely adore them! Dogs are like juvenile wolves to an adult wolf – very puppy-like and often seen thus as no threat.

Q3 Did humans have dogs when they were at the hunter / gatherer stage, i.e. before they became settled with livestock?

This is difficult to answer as we have no hard evidence, but I would suggest that some individual wolves may have hung around / followed human groups looking for food scraps, and these would perhaps be low-ranking or small/sick wolves who were not great hunters and so in need of extra sustenance – they may well have been the less aggressive wolves who gained the trust of humans and vice versa. Thus it is possible that the process of domestication (i.e. becoming the sub species we know today as dogs) began at the hunter-gatherer stage.

Q4 How did water dogs with webbed feet evolve? Was it a natural feature that was noticed and selectively bred?

Several modern dog breeds have webbed feet – good for digging, standing on mud and swimming. Given how relatively common canine webbed feet are, we can perhaps assume that this is a lasting and repeating side effect of selecting for other attributes such as double coat etc. which carry with them (genetically speaking) other features which help a dog in water.

Newfoundland's for example have waterproof fur, great stamina, webbed feet and a specialized swimming style which is more efficient than standard 'doggy paddle'.

Useful links and resources

Wolf.org - Alpha status, dominance and division of labor in wolf packs, L David Mech

Time.com – article on the science of dog training

Forthcoming WEA courses by Dr Joanne Wilshaw

Taster: Animal psychology: dog behavior (C3533563) – 22 April, 11.00am

Animal psychology: dog behavior (C3533564) – 24 April, starting 29 April, 11.00am

Also a dog training course Training with trust coming in the summer.